The Washo speak a Hokan language; their neighbors to the east, the Northern Paiute, speak a Utaztekan language; the Maidu and Miwok to the west are Penutian speakers. The Hokan languages are widely scattered from California through Mexico and into Central America, and are considered to be among the oldest languages in California. The lexicostatistics of Hokan indicate that Washo separated from Yana, only 60 mi. northwest of the Washo, 5000 years ago.

Kroeber (1955) wrote that "It is evident that the geographical proximity of Yana and Washo is a secondary and recent affair, and that they have been separated not only for a long period but probably, by a considerable geographical interval for much of that time. Washo in fact proves to have been split off from every other computed Hokan language for 45C or more."

Lamb (1958) shows linguistic evidence for the presence of the Proto-Utaztekan people around the Arizona-Sonora, Mexico, region 5000 years ago. After several splits and migrations within the language family there was a general movement north and eastward by the Shoshonean division about 1000 years ago, a movement that was still in progress 500 years ago. In the 1800's the Shoshoneans were the principal language group present in the Great Basin. Linguistic data suggest, therefore, a pattern of Shoshonean contacts over a long period of time which is important in any interpretation of Washo prehistory.

In contrast to the linguistic differences, the Washo appear to be closely related racially to the surrounding tribes. At least, according to the anthropometric study made by Gifford in 1926, the Washo are included with Northern Paiute, Miwok, and many other groups in his "narrow-nosed subtype" of the "Californian type." This similarity is also suggested by the work on Great Basin population by Kennedy (1959).

The Washo are culturally, as well as geographically, between eastern California and Great Basin tribes. Barrett (1917) pointed out Washo relationships on both sides of the Sierra Nevada with Californian affinities indicated by the conical house, bedrock mortar, soaproot brush, coiled basketry with descriptively named geometric patterns, and acorns as a food. Heizer and Elsasser (1953, 4) added language affiliation, looped withe hot rock lifter, and flat mush stirring paddle to this list.

Heizer and Elsasser (1953, 4) state that "affiliations of Washo culture with that of the Shoshonean tribes to the east in the Great Basin proper are: long net for catching rabbits by driving techniques; special 'boss' for rabbit and deer hunt; rabbitskin blanket; heavy dependence for food on nuts of piñon (Pinus monophylla) with the complex of implements and activities used to